



MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SENIOR SERVICES

Public Health Preparedness and Response UPDATE

Keeping You Informed

October 2004

DHSS Renews \$5.6 million Contracts with Local Public Health Agencies

The Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) and 114 local public health agencies throughout the state are renewing their contracts to expand and continue their efforts to protect Missouri's citizens during a public health emergency or terrorist attack. Over \$5.3 million will be provided to 32 local public health agencies to enhance emergency planning and preparedness at the regional level. This year's funding will also provide \$287,000 to 82 local public health agencies to purchase equipment and provide staff education and training. This is the third year for the funding; the new grant period covers September 1, 2004 to August 31, 2005.

Improved Access to Bioterrorism Surveillance Data Now Available

Bioterrorism Surveillance (BTS) within the Office of Surveillance is proud to announce that access to the daily BTS data reported from a county / region / jurisdiction to Missouri's Sentinel System is now available to senior and regional epidemiologists and local public health agency (LPHA) personnel, as designated by their administrator. This will allow the capability to:

- ◆ View the daily aggregated BTS data reported in a jurisdiction.

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Flu Clinics Utilize Bioterrorism Preparedness

Anthrax. Smallpox. Tularemia. Influenza? Who would have thought the 2004 annual flu clinics would be the next "public health emergency" to hit Missouri?

Faced with a vaccine shortage, or no vaccine at all and frustrated and even irate citizens, local public health departments are dealing with a genuine public health emergency. The planning and exercising done over the last two years to prepare for a bioterrorist attack is now being tested in response to the vaccine shortage.

Local Public Health Agencies are contacting each other for support, additional manpower, and communication needs. They are reaching out to their emergency management offices for resources. They have asked law enforcement for security assistance. They are utilizing newly recruited volunteers.

If there is a silver lining to this dark cloud of flu vaccine shortage, it is that local public health departments have been given an opportunity to test the plans they have been working on for a long time. This flu season reemphasizes the importance of all-hazards planning and of building relationships with partners long before they are needed.

*by Jaci McReynolds, Public Health Information Specialist,
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Emergency Response Resources Expanding through Telehealth Network

Missouri was among four states to participate recently in a Southern Governors' Association (SGA) video project demonstrating the Telehealth Network, a telemedicine and conferencing capability enabling immediate communication among state health departments and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The project included a multi-faceted group of individuals working together to show how the Telehealth Network could be used in an emergency event. The Telehealth Network enables a specialist to observe a patient and converse with both the attending physician and patient by videoconference to discuss protocols and actions to be taken.

University of Missouri - Columbia helped launch Missouri's Telehealth Network in 1995 with more than \$9 million in private and government funding. Missouri's Telehealth Network (MTN) is available in 60 sites within 27 counties around the state. Missouri's Telehealth Network is one of the nation's largest and will soon expand to an additional 35 sites, including community health centers, creating many new opportunities for medical care, education, and research. As part of the Department of Health and Senior Services' commitment to bioterrorism preparedness, final negotiations are underway with Missouri's Telehealth Network to connect 21 new hospitals and the department.

Last year MTN received the President's Award for the Advancement of Science from the American Telemedicine Association.

The Department of Health and Senior Services and UMC are currently working with the Southern Governors' Association on another scenario that will involve all 16 states and two territories that make up the SGA. The goal is to get all 50 states linked to make this a nationwide communications network.

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- ◆ Compare this data to the reports from local active surveillance sites.
- ◆ Relieve the duplicative burden of faxing and e-mailing the daily BTS reports.
- ◆ Add the ability to review BTS data from other locations, which can be extremely helpful during Orange alerts.

A letter was e-mailed recently to all of the senior and regional epidemiology specialists and LPHA Administrators announcing this new service, providing access forms, and explaining how to complete them. If you have any questions regarding the BTS web-based system or gaining access to it, please feel free to contact Angela Krutsinger or Terry Eslahi, DHSS Office of Surveillance, at 573-522-9071.

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Our state and local public health mission is to protect the communities' health and the well-being of individuals of all ages by assuring the early detection and the rapid, coordinated response to all public health emergencies, both natural and deliberate.